

BILL DE LA VEGA, AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN LEGEND

I met Bill de la Vega through a mutual friend, Corry van Hemert, a ballet teacher, in the mid seventies. An extremely friendly young talented and modest artist!

At that time Bill himself was, in the least, aware of his increasing popularity. Not only within the cultural and artistic circle, but also among the business, commercial and horeca society.

I was fascinated by his artwork, which consisted mainly of drawings and paintings, and took much interest in studying his painting style. His artwork, which was



displayed at the Talk of the Town and at the Manchebo, was commissioned by Mr. Ike Cohen. Bill was also befriended with the archeologist Ep Boerstra, and assisted him in sketching his archeological findings, which became a focal part of many of his paintings. Very realistic with lots of texture! Nevertheless he challenged himself to a variety of themes and a grand scale of techniques! He used his own mixed media, which included commercial and organic substances, such as sand, seashells, pebbles, plastic, ground earth, etc.

Mr. Cohen once told me in an interview, the following about Bill; *"I met Bill de la Vega in Haiti, during a conference of the Caribbean Hotel Association. I was a member of*

the board.. Bill was just a small, thin boy walking around with a sketchpad and ballpoint under his arm. He drew with a ballpoint! Because once a line was drawn, that was it! Never to be erased! That line had all the shading the drawing needed as well. He did portraits of officials. I could't believe my eyes!"

And he continued to express how impressed he was with this young talent.

Just having bought the Manchebo and just about decorating it in a primitive way; he decided to approach this young talent to commission him to produce an amount of paintings for him in Aruba. On which the young artist replied: "I don't paint!". And Mr. Cohen replies convincingly: "You can paint!" Bill did follow up on Mr. Cohen's request and started his "big" commission, consisting of 72 paintings. After completing the 39th painting he stopped. Bill was then gaining popularity and was offered plenty much more for his work than his "official job" offered.

This young talented artist, who was born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, came to Aruba, learned the language rapidly, married an Arubian and became one of us, was on a roller-coaster to fame! A great illustrator, illustrating the acclaimed book "Historia di Aruba Epoca Spaño", painting murals of which unfortunately there are no more traces. Giving art classes in different "Centro di Bario's". (Community Centers) and working for the Government at the Tourist Office and at the Department of Education with Mr. Hubert Booi, organizing



and judging art shows etc.

In 1977 he designed all the floats and costumes for the De Veer Corporation to participate in the big carnival parade. He was also a great portraitist. A multi-talented artist and eventually ... he became internationally well-known.

Now, 11 years after his death, there are but few who remember this artistic legend. Carmen Maduro, ex-wife, took the initiative and started the William de la Veg'Art foundation. (More information is available on the website.)

Mr. Ike Cohen has generously donated the entire collection of Bill's paintings to the foundation. The foundation is in the process of publicizing a photo book containing most of the art work of William de la Vega and organizing an exhibition of some of his work in the near future. Hopefully, through this book and exhibition the value of an almost forgotten legend will gain recognition for his contribution to the development of ARTS in Aruba. ■

**Nigel Matthew (60) was born in Aruba and studied art in The Hague and Amsterdam (Netherlands). Nigel was a dedicated art teacher at Colegio Arubano for thirty years. Although retired, he is still active as teacher at Instituto Pedagógico Arubano and also contributes in developing new curriculum. He enjoys being a grandfather to his three grandchildren.*

